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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001546

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEW TURKISH GOVERNMENT: WHAT WILL ERDOGAN'S CABINET LOOK LIKE?

REF: ANKARA 1364

(U) Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: AK Party chairman Erdogan has the mandate to form a new Turkish government. We expect him to shuffle the outgoing cabinet, although timing of the shuffle is not yet certain. While the Erdogan government might assume office quickly, contacts across the spectrum advise us Erdogan is not in a hurry to re-submit a U.S. deployment resolution to parliament. End summary.

2. (U) AK Party chairman Tayyip Erdogan has taken the oath as an M.P., current P.M. Abdullah Gul has submitted his resignation, and President Sezer has given Erdogan the mandate to form a new government.

3. (U) We expect Erdogan to submit his cabinet list to Sezer quickly, perhaps as early as March 12. Reftel gives the sequence and timing of steps for the new government to assume power, present its program, and then be confirmed in a vote of confidence. In any event the Erdogan government will take office from the moment Sezer approves a cabinet list and sends it to parliament, which could be as early as March 12.

4. (C) Korkut Ozal, a brother of late P.M./President Turgut Ozal and a Godfather to the reformist wing of the National View (Milli Gorus) Islamist movement ("the Movement") which Erdogan grew up in, told us March 11 he has urged Erdogan to focus first on passing a U.S. deployment resolution and only then shuffle the cabinet. Otherwise, Ozal thinks, the resentments provoked by changes in the cabinet will further distract Erdogan and compound the fate of any new draft resolution. Ozal acknowledged, however, that Erdogan's temper may get the better of him and lead him to shuffle the cabinet at the beginning of his tenure.

5. (C) Faruk Demir -- the executive director of the Advanced Strategy Center (YSM), which has close links to the TGS, NSC, and National Intelligence Organization -- told us March 10 that he has heard Erdogan's cabinet shuffle may affect a sizeable slice of the cabinet. Demir's analysis of why Erdogan may replace some or all of the following:

--Deputy P.M. Ertugrul Yalcinbayir (known as a "liberalist"; he reportedly voted against the draft resolution to permit deployment of U.S. troops because he already knew he would not be included in the Erdogan cabinet);
--Deputy P.M. Mehmet Ali Sahin (seen by Erdogan's circle as too close to Gul);
--State Minister in charge of finance Ali Babacan (nervous, pushy, and lacking the sense of deference Erdogan demands);
--State Minister in charge of foreign trade Kursad Tuzmen (not deferential enough);
--State Minister in charge of religious affairs Mehmet Aydin (reportedly close to Islamist philosopher Fethullah Gulen, and thus not considered inside the National View Islamist circle among Erdogan's close advisors);
--Fonmin Yasar Yakis (Erdogan had not wanted Yakis as Fonmin in the Gul government, but was forced to put him in the position in a rearrangement resulting from Sezer's rejection of another cabinet designate; in any event, Yakis has been a hack-handed embarrassment to Erdogan);
--Culture Minister Huseyin Celik (similarly to Yalcinbayir, voted against the deployment resolution because he had heard he would not be in Erdogan's cabinet; in any event controversial as minister);
--Tourism Minister Aksit (ineffective);
--Education Minister Erkan Mumcu (not from the Movement and too openly ambitious for Erdogan's taste; might be shifted to a lower-profile ministry).

6. (C) Demir said his sources tell him that, as part of a move to reduce the number of ministries, Erdogan may combine the Babacan and Tuzmen portfolios under a single

finance/foreign trade state ministership; figures rumored to be under consideration are AK Party deputy chairman for research and development Reha Denemec (excellent English; MBA from the U.S.) or Nazim Ekrem.

17. (C) In addition a visibly nervous Justice Minister Cemil Cicek, one of the most experienced members of Gul's cabinet but not a member of the Movement, told us March 11 he is not certain he will be kept on, a reflection of how close to the chest Erdogan is keeping his choices.

18. (C) Mehmet Ali Bayar, a former Turkish diplomat with wide political contacts and now senior foreign policy advisor to right-of-center DYP chairman Agar, warned us March 11 that Erdogan will stall submission of a new draft deployment resolution as long as possible. Bayar opines that Erdogan and his advisors are wrapped up in narrowly-focused calculations of how to ensure personal position and power. In making a similar assessment to us March 10, YSM executive director Demir stated that Erdogan is scared for his political future and therefore paralyzed in his decision-making on the deployment question.

19. (C) Founding member of Ozal's ANAP and former close Ozal advisor Vehbi Dincerler affirmed to us as well March 11 that Erdogan will not tangle with the resolution unless the U.S. gives him something he can portray to the Turkish public as an additional U.S. commitment, e.g., a concrete clarification of Turkey's role in post-Saddam Iraq, a U.S. commitment on the role of the Turkmen in N. Iraq, a stronger U.S. commitment to prevent formation of an independent Kurdish state. In discussing timing, Korkut Ozal told us that the lack of an absolute drop-dead date from the U.S. for the beginning of hostilities is also making it hard for Erdogan to feel a sense of urgency.

PEARSON